

Westminster City Street Crew Working For You...

Have you ever opened a hot oven to remove cooked food? Now try leaving the door open and set on 325° Fahrenheit, then calculate the ambient temperature of 80-90° Fahrenheit. This simulates the conditions street workers must endure to work with hot asphalt. Every job in blacktopping is hot. Even sitting on the paver is hot since propane tanks run to keep the asphalt warm. The flagmen must stand in the sun with heat radiating off the pavement. The roller operator gets heat from the hot asphalt and the heat of the equipment. The lute men (rakers) get heat from the hot asphalt. And even when rotating jobs, there is no escaping the sweltering conditions. But, after all that, the worst scorch we get is from busy drivers. Many people assume that Street Department workers are lazy because they take a break to get water. And that the only real reason the workers are there is to inconvenience them.

Most of the blacktopping jobs the City does are too small for a paver, so it must be done by hand. Street Department workers cut and dig out the patch in the road, usually a utility repair, and fill it in with hot asphalt. Typically, backfilling is done in three separate levels, which are compacted between each. The asphalt must cool before traffic is allowed on it in order to keep the patch from rutting or tearing. This process is why work appears to be finished, but traffic is still inconvenienced. When workers do get to use the paver, they must first mill down the road to keep it from getting thicker than the curb. A 36" milling machine is used, and any excess is also removed, followed by patching any loose or rutted areas. Finally, the paver is brought in and loaded with asphalt by trucks. However, even when using the paver, there is hand work to be done. There are storm drains, manhole covers, valve boxes, and other obstacles to work around. Manpower is the main reason that the Street Department cannot do more in-house overlay or road repair. When paving, a minimum of workers is needed: two on the paver, one on lutes, one on a shovel, one on a roller, two in dump trucks, and two flagmen. The City Street Department only has a four-man blacktopping crew, so when paving, men are borrowed from other crews, which means that the other departments' work has to be put on hold.

So far in fiscal year 2008-2009, we have placed over 775 tons of blacktop. This is approximately 500 tons more than normal. Typically the paver is not used enough, but the Street Department hired more experienced operators and has learned how to overhaul better and more efficiently operate the paver.

So, the next time you are inconvenienced due to blacktopping operations, please remember how hot the workers are and give them a break by not getting hot under your collar.